

# THE AUK :

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF

ORNITHOLOGY.

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VOL. XXIV.

APRIL, 1907.

No. 2.

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## ORNITHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS IN NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS, WITH NOTES ON SOME WINTER BIRDS.

BY JOHN F. FERRY.

IN THE extreme northeastern corner of Illinois lies a region of unusual interest to the ornithologist. Between the years 1853 and 1873 it was thoroughly explored by Robt. Kennicott, E. W. Nelson, and F. T. Jencks, as well as by resident ornithologists, and it has furnished many an interesting bird note for northern Illinois. Of late years it has been almost totally ignored, possibly through the natural supposition that the rapid settlement of the surrounding country had completely changed its character. As a matter of fact, it remains to-day essentially in its primitive condition. The cause is obvious; the land is practically worthless save for one purpose, that of manufacturing sites. In all probability many years will elapse before the thriving industries of Waukegan, the county seat immediately south, will occupy the whole region. Two causes, one for the better, the other for the worse, have made such changes as now exist. The one is the marked improvement of the land through the planting of trees, the other is the partial draining of the swamps. The former is one of great interest, not alone to the ornithologist but to the forester and horticulturist as well. The propagation of many varieties of forest trees was carried on by some local nurserymen on such an extensive scale and in so intelligent a manner that it created a wide interest among nurserymen generally and among those who had the problem to solve of beautifying or reclaiming from practical

worthlessness large areas of barren, sandy, or otherwise sterile regions.

The proprietor of the R. Douglass Son's Nursery, Waukegan, was the one who carried on this praiseworthy work. An added element of interest in the present connection is that the sons of the proprietor, then young men, were all active ornithologists. They furnished many valuable notes to the ornithological writers of that time, and it gives me pleasure to again bring to notice the name of Mr. Thomas H. Douglass, a collecting companion of E. W. Nelson, who has kindly given me the early history of the region herein described. This project of reforestation included the purchase of over 600 acres of sandy barren land in 1873, and the planting thereon during the succeeding 15 years or so, of over 200,000 trees. The following species were represented: balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), balsam fir (*Abies fraseri*), Norway spruce (*Picea excelsa*), white spruce (*Picea alba*), Norway pine (*Pinus resinosa*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Austrian pine (*Pinus austriaca*), Swiss mountain pine (*Pinus mughus*), table nut pine (*Pinus pingeus*), European larch (*Larix europea*), American larch (*Larix americana*), arbor-vitæ (*Thuja occidentalis*), yellow birch (*Betula lutea*), black birch (*Betula lenta*), catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*), red ash (*Fraxinus pubescens*), white ash (*F. americana*), green ash (*F. viridis*), mountain ash (*Sorbus americana*), European alder (*Alnus glutinosus*), chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), beech-nut (*Fagus americana*), walnut (*Juglans nigra*), hickory (*Hicoria* sp?), and several species of oaks (*Quercus*). The work was done with surprisingly little expense. The surplus of each year's nursery supply was taken to the spot, and the seedlings placed in narrow furrows made with the plow in the damp sand. Here the successful species grew with little further care. The experiment proved an interesting illustration of the survival of the fittest. Most of the species tried died, but, profiting by experience, the experimenters planted during the succeeding years only the hardier varieties. The result to-day, after 30 years have elapsed, are two long tracts of sturdy Scotch pine, with an occasional European larch, or white pine. This artificial forest is one of absorbing interest to the ornithologist. It stands conspicuous in the desolation of marsh and sand dune, and is unique in a region where

native conifers are almost entirely absent. Here migrants and winter visitants find an ideal feeding ground and a haven of rest.

A brief description of the region may be of interest. It extends from the city of Waukegan due north for about six miles. It is a low, sandy waste of dunes and ridges, the latter running northeast parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan, and varies from one half mile in width at its southern end to one and a half to two miles at the northern extremity. Before being partially drained, much of the region was water, occurring in the forms of a wide, shallow pond and two 'dead' rivers. These latter were channels from twenty to thirty rods in width, and without natural outlet. These channels and the pond were continuous and formed a natural waterway extending north and south almost the entire length of the region. Small tributary sloughs entered this larger body. Most of the region is less than ten feet above the lake and only in cases of high water did these confined waters break through a narrow spit and flow into the lake. The dunes and ridges are covered with two species of Juniper (*Juniperus communis* and *J. sabona* var. *procumbens*), sand berries (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), huckle-berries (*Gaylussacia resinosa*), dwarf alder (*Alnus serrulata*), white birch (*Betula populifolia*), and with occasionally white pines and poplars. In its more northern portion are ash, wild raspberries (*Rubus strigosus*), and black oaks (*Quercus velutina*). The western boundary of this region is 'the bluff,' a characteristic feature of the shore of Lake Michigan in this locality. Here it is heavily wooded with a fine hardwood forest of walnut, hickory, various oaks, and the red and sugar maple (*Acer rubrum* and *A. saccharum*).

This region received the writer's close attention during the fall of 1906, weekly visits being made during September, October, and November. This season appeared to be one of remarkable ornithological interest, as the following list of winter visitants will show. Most of the birds were found among the dense pines above described.

The following notes were taken while collecting for the Field Museum of Natural History.

**Euphagus carolinus.** RUSTY BLACKBIRD. — Specimens were taken at the lake shore on January 22, feeding in a corn field, the first winter record of this species for this region.

**Hesperiphona vespertina.** EVENING GROSBEEK.—A flock of seven of these interesting and erratic birds was observed on November 10 in Waukegan by Mr. C. W. Douglass. They were feeding on the seeds of a box elder growing along one of the city streets. On November 18 they were observed in practically the same spot, and on this same date Mr. H. K. Coale saw two males and five females feeding on a maple in Highland Park. He also reports that a flock of seven are still (Feb. 7) in Highland Park, feeding on maple seeds, etc., in private grounds. He again saw two birds about December 1 in the same locality. Mr. F. S. Daggett saw two birds at River Forest on Christmas Day, and the writer heard one calling in the same locality on January 13. These birds have been seen in Lake Forest three or more different years, occurring in large flocks. They showed a great fondness for willow buds, and also frequently fed upon the ground, where the entire flock could be seen working industriously among last year's fallen leaves. They would usually remain till late in the spring, when they would depart in a body.

**Pinicola enucleator leucura.** PINE GROSBEEK.—This species was presumably seen on November 9 and an immature specimen was taken on November 17. It was accompanied by another immature bird at the time. They were found in a thick clump of pines and were moving quietly among the lower branches. They occasionally uttered their low call-note. The following day six birds were seen in Lake Forest, a suburb ten miles to the south. They were feeding on the dried fruit of ash and maple trees. No brilliantly colored males were seen in this flock. They were inclined to be wary when in the flock, but when feeding singly, one could almost stand beneath the tree where the bird was. The birds called to one another frequently, and if really alarmed, the scattered birds would soon gather and the assembled flock would fly off together uttering their clear musical whistle. The birds were next seen on the 25th of November, and a flock of Grosbeaks, presumably of this species, was seen the last of December or the first of January. This flock may follow the habit of previous ones and remain within the park-like city of Lake Forest for the winter.

**Carpodacus purpureus.** PURPLE FINCH.—The Purple Finches

were first observed on August 27, and were repeatedly observed during September, October and November, at times being quite abundant. They are a regular winter resident in this locality and show a decided fondness for the seeds of the horn beam. Barberry and other fruit-bearing shrubbery is also a favorite resort of this bird.

***Loxia curvirostra minor.*** AMERICAN CROSSBILL.

***Loxia leucoptera.*** WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.—The abundance of Crossbills — both species — was perhaps the most interesting feature of this season's bird-study. On October 6 both species were taken, flocks of 10–15 of each kind being observed. They were found in the thick pines, and they made the area grown with these trees resound with their penetrating, metallic notes. These birds must have been continually present from October 6 until December 25 when one bird was seen. They were seen on each of weekly trips made during October and November and at times were extremely abundant, their clear, high-pitched calls being heard almost constantly. The White-winged Crossbills possibly outnumbered the red variety, two to one. Their distribution in the vicinity of Chicago seems to have been very general, as one or both species has been reported from Jackson Park, Chicago, Glen Ellyn, River Forest, and Lake Forest. In the latter place on October 28, several large flocks, one of them numbering about 40 individuals, were seen flying restlessly about private grounds where conifers were abundant. A few detached individuals were frequently observed to suddenly halt their flight overhead and drop into the top of a tall spruce, where they seemed to vanish completely. After a short lapse they would start calling, and then, if they did not suddenly take flight, they would be seen moving like miniature parrots, along the branches in search of cones. The note of the White-winged Crossbill somewhat resembles the call of the Pine Siskin, but it is much magnified in tone and volume. When calling to each other the note has a sharp, strident quality, which the observer can quite easily imitate by giving short, sharp, quick whistles. By this mimicry a flock passing overhead can frequently be lured into the top of the tree beneath which the observer stands. The wariness exhibited by both species varies greatly with circumstances. At times a flock

will alight in the leafless branches of a tree-top, from which they will take flight at the first sign of danger. At other times the observer may approach a low spruce tree in which they are feeding and only with great difficulty can they be dislodged. The white-winged species seems much more disposed to feed upon the ground than its congeners. They are fond of juniper berries and this fall Mr. R. J. Douglass observed them feeding on dried sun-flower seeds, which were still embedded in the withered flower. At the Douglass Nursery a few years ago the White-winged Crossbills appeared in the early spring and descended upon seedling conifers in such numbers that the birds were systematically shot. The Crossbills appear to migrate in large flocks and when a favorable locality is found they scatter in small flocks of a dozen to three or four individuals. When thus scattered it is not uncommon for a lone one to shoot down out of space, and make the place resound with its clear, penetrating calls, which at such times seem to possess an anxious or frightened quality. A friendly call of one of its kind will send the straggler hastily thither. The White-winged Crossbills exhibited an almost endless variety of plumage. The highly colored male birds were comparatively few, being far outnumbered by the females and immature birds in nearly every stage of juvenile plumage. Some young birds resembled the female Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and from this degree of plainness a very interesting case of varied coloration was seen. These two species of Crossbill frequently intermingle. All specimens of these species taken this fall were exceedingly fat.

**Acanthis linaria.** COMMON REDPOLL.—The Redpolls were first observed on November 9, and were abundant at that time. They were first seen in flocks of 25 or more but later divided into smaller companies, some of them joining bands of Goldfinches and Siskins. In closely assembled flocks they alight in a patch of weeds and feed upon the seeds. They work industriously and in perfect silence. Their note, a cheery, plaintive, canary-like call, has a singular sweetness when it is the only bird melody of a bleak winter day.

**Spinus pinus.** PINE SISKIN.—On September 30, the first Siskins were seen, when a flock of about 15 flew over Lake Forest. Their plaintive, rasping note makes them easily distinguished

while on the wing. Several times a large flock of Siskins were seen to alight on the top branches of a low pine and fairly cover it, like a swarm of bees. Unlike the Crossbills they were observed to feed industriously on coneless branches of pines and spruces. The object sought was probably the dry resinous aments of these conifers. They frequent patches of thistle and seed-bearing weeds and work very actively and in perfect silence. They decoy readily to an imitation of their note, and will alight fearlessly within a few feet of the observer. The specimens secured were in excellent condition, quite fat, and the immature birds formed a large proportion of every flock.

**Passerina nivalis.** SNOWFLAKE.—A flock of six Snowflakes were seen October 28 on the wide, sandy beach at Lake Forest. From the high bluff overlooking, they could be seen running rapidly from one scanty tuft of grass to another. On November 5, while the writer and a companion were out on Lake Michigan in a row-boat, a small white bird suddenly appeared out of the enveloping haze and passed within three oar-lengths of us. It was clearly identified as a snowflake. These birds were seen again on the 9th of November, and were last seen at Jackson Park on December 15. They are locally a common winter resident here. When alarmed they quickly take flight, and they have an interesting habit of returning to the spot from which they were frightened, after having apparently vanished.

**Calcarius lapponicus.** LAPLAND LONGSPUR.—Longspurs were very abundant this fall. On November 5, a flock of birds uttering the familiar longspur note passed overhead flying due south. Similar flocks were observed on the 9th and 17th, and on the 18th four or five large flocks flew in a northeasterly direction, over the Government Pier at Waukegan, which extends three or four hundred yards into the lake. It is reasonably certain that a large majority of such flocks were composed of *C. lapponicus*, as *C. pictus* is irregular and not common in this region while *lapponicus* is just the reverse. The latter often occur in vast flocks. The extensive low prairies south and west of Chicago are a favorite resort of this bird.

**Calcarius pictus.** SMITH'S LONGSPUR.—A flock of forty of this species was observed on November 29 by Gerard A. Abbott on the Golf Links at Jackson Park. He flushed them three times, getting

within a few paces of them. They are not a common bird in this vicinity.

**Zonotrichia albicollis.** WHITE-THROATED SPARROW.—On January 24, while hunting for winter birds on the beach, I captured four adult specimens of this species. The day was very cold (1°–10° above zero) with a high northwest wind. This is the first known occurrence of this species here in winter.

**Cardinalis cardinalis.** CARDINAL.—A pair of these birds were observed on January 13, at River Forest. They are not a common bird here at any season. The spot where they were seen was on the Desplaines River, and they are usually encountered along the heavy timber and underbrush of several rivers in the vicinity which make convenient highways from the center of their abundance in the central and southern portion of the State. Mr. Frank Gates of Chicago reports one seen on the Desplaines River, west of Chicago, on December 24, and one seen in Graceland Cemetery, Chicago, on the 25th and 29th of December and on January 1.

**Lanius borealis.** NORTHERN SHRIKE.—These birds are of regular occurrence here in the winter. One was seen this year on October 12 at Jackson Park, and specimens were taken on October 25 and November 9. On the latter date a half-eaten White-winged Crossbill, impaled on a dead pine branch, was observed, and the abundance of small birds in the heavy pines, doubtless was a strong attraction to the shrikes.

**Ampelis garrulus.** BOHEMIAN WAXWING.—The arrival of this irregular winter visitant had been eagerly watched for, when on November 22 Mr. T. H. Douglass saw a flock of ten clustering on his small spruce trees and later feeding on barberry bushes close by. Two were seen by H. S. Swarth about Jackson Park, Chicago, February 2–7, feeding on barberries, and one was taken on the 7th. These birds have often been observed in this locality, they sometimes occurring in immense flocks. Their appearance, however, is very uncertain. They sometimes seek the deep woods for shelter, but they feed more in the open country, where berries and seeds still cling to the shrubbery and trees.

**Penthestes hudsonicus.** HUDSONIAN CHICKADEE.—This bird was first met on November 5<sup>1</sup> in a heavy clump of pines, where

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned, without definite data, by F. M. Woodruff in 'The Auk' for January, 1907, p. 107.

its little scolding note was several times heard before the bird itself was captured by the writer. On the 8th two more specimens were captured. On November 10 a single bird was observed in Lake Forest, hopping in a lively manner in a small apple tree. It showed no fear and several times could have been touched with a walking stick. These four specimens, occurring in localities ten miles apart, might suggest a rather general occurrence of these rare stragglers from the north. The only other occurrence of this bird in Illinois, was when Dr. Velie observed it at Rock Island subsequent to 1852. Mr. Wells W. Cooke informs the writer that the bird taken on November 5 may safely be considered the second record for the State.

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## THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE ENGLISH SPARROW PROBLEM IN AMERICA.

BY A. H. ESTABROOK.

THE English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), was introduced into the United States in the fall of 1850. The first few pairs were liberated at Brooklyn, N. Y. In the few years then following, many others were liberated at different cities in the United States, so that by 1875, they had spread over practically the whole area east of the Mississippi. From the time of its introduction, there was a storm of protest from the practical naturalists who foresaw the result of its introduction, from its behavior in other countries. They knew its record in countries where it had been a longer resident. The people who introduced the sparrow believed that it would be an insectivorous bird, and would take care of the canker worm which was then troubling the people very much. The canker worm is no longer a pest, but its destruction by the sparrow is not granted by the ornithologists. E. H. Forbush, in his report on the Gypsy moth states that the sparrow has been